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News Release

New England Healthcare System
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VA New England Surpasses 85,000 Video Visits

VA Video Connect visits increase over 1,800 percent regionwide during COVID-19 pandemic

BEDFORD, Mass. -- The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs recently announced that video telehealth appointments to Veterans' homes increased more than 1,000 percent -- <https://www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=5467> -- as Veterans increasingly chose virtual care through VA Video Connect during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In New England, VA medical centers and sites of care have conducted 87,296 VA Video Connect appointments between February and July 1. Because VA New England already had a robust telehealth infrastructure in place, the health care system was able to ramp up its telehealth capabilities to meet increased demand.

VA Video Connect allows Veterans and their caregivers to meet virtually with their VA care teams on any computer, tablet or mobile device with an internet connection. As in-person interactions decreased in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, VA Video Connect supported Veterans' abilities to continue care and remain safely at home. Use of video to home services has been increasing since mid-March, reaching more than 29,000 nationwide appointments per day at its peak. Peak usage here in New England has resulted in more than 1,557 appointments per day.

In post-appointment surveys, Veterans said they are relieved to be able to maintain continuity of care. Most report that they have not had trouble adjusting to the new technology. Veterans have also told VA New England that they are satisfied to have their health care needs met virtually, without interrupting their care.

VA New England Video Visits Increase

The increase throughout the VA New England Healthcare System represents a 1,833 percent increase since the start of the pandemic. VA New England's telehealth encounters, overall, have nearly quadrupled in the past six months over the same period in 2019. From Oct. 1, 2018, through June 30, 2019, VA New England reported 31,658 telehealth encounters, compared with 113,766 telehealth encounters from Oct. 1, 2019 through June 30, 2020, VA New England has reported.

"VA New England's connected health continuum, rapid digital upscaling and virtual care provider network has been integral to the provision of critical healthcare services and the safety of Veterans and staff during the COVID-19 pandemic response," said Lisa Eisele, a registered nurse and VA New England Healthcare System Connected Care Program director. "A major component of this network has been VA Video Connect. We've surpassed – nearly doubled – the national response so we are very proud of how many Veterans have used this critical telehealth option for connecting with our health care teams."

Eisele noted that the VA is nearing the three-year anniversary of the launch of VA Video Connect. The popular service provides a seamless experience for Veterans to ensure they have access to care "where and when they need it," she said.

As of June 1, VA Video Connect has reported similar significant increases seen since the start of the pandemic at each of VA New England's health care systems as follows. The total numbers reported at each system, between Feb. 1 and June 1, 2020, are noted in parenthesis.

Bedford VA Medical Center, Bedford, Mass. – 1,623 percent (5,298)

VA Boston Healthcare System – 1,584 percent (16,075)

VA Central Western Massachusetts Healthcare System – 1,969 percent (6,061)

VA Connecticut Healthcare System – 1,315 percent (7,637)

Manchester VA Medical Center, Manchester, N.H. – 2,032 percent (3,862)

VA Providence Healthcare System, Providence, R.I. – 3,015 percent (8,228)

VA Maine Healthcare System – 2,032 percent (5,612)

VA White River Junction Healthcare System, White River Junction, Vt. – 1,591 percent (4,563)

VA is also taking strides to bridge the digital divide for Veterans who lack the technology or broadband internet connectivity required to participate in VA telehealth services. At the national level, VA is

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working with strategic partners -- <https://www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=5467> -- through the VA Secretary's Center of Strategic Partnerships -- <https://www.va.gov/scsp/> -- to increase access to the technology that Veterans need to connect with their VA health care team virtually.

Read more about VA Video Connect at <https://mobile.va.gov/app/va-video-connect>. For information about VA's telehealth services, visit <http://www.connectedcare.va.gov/>.

ABOUT VA NEW ENGLAND: VA New England Healthcare System, or VISN 1, is one of 18 Veterans Integrated Service Networks (VISNs) within the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. VISN 1 has 11 medical centers, 45 CBOCs, six community living centers and two domiciliaries.

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